Dear Mr. Bandt,

Please accept this letter as part of your public comment time on your agenda. You may or may not be aware that the Waushara County Land Conservation & Zoning Department (LCD&Z) is implementing a Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Lakes Classification Grant. Our next phase (Phase III) of this grant is to develop, write and/or update Lake Management Plans. We are asking that the Town consider being involved in the process. The first of our public meetings will be held in late October and early November. I am happy to come to your next meeting and discuss further the project we are undertaking. Below is a synopsis of current phase we are in:

Lake management plans will be developed for 33 lakes in Waushara County. When possible, we will combine multiple lakes into one planning process and plan. In most instances, the proposed groups will have similar municipalities/geography. We assumed that individual planning processes will be needed for developed lakes and/or lakes with significant challenges. The planning process will take place over a series of five meetings. Five of the meetings will be informational and the sixth meeting will solicit public input and will inform elected officials in the local municipality. We anticipate completing all lake plans over a 3.5 year period.

The intent of the plan development design used in this project is to provide opportunities for the community to make informed decisions about lake management that is unique and appropriate for each lake. This will not only enable citizens’ input and visions to be woven throughout the plans but will result in a contingent of informed citizens, elected officials, and county staff to carry out restoration and protection of the Waushara County lakes long after the planning process has concluded.

Many of the property owners around the Waushara County lakes are not full time residents so we are proposing a unique survey process to enable citizens to garner information and participate as a part of a focus group even if they are unable to attend the planning meetings. Prior to each meeting, topic-specific surveys of lake property owners, community residents, and lake users will be prepared. The first survey will be sent to riparian landowners with an invitation to participate in the development of the lake management plan. The next round of surveys will be sent to all riparian landowners around the lake, and anyone in the watershed that responded to the first survey. The content of each survey will align with the information that will be covered during the next planning meeting. Respondents will access surveys online; however, hard copies of the surveys will be mailed to riparian landowners that have requested this service by returning a postcard from the first mailing. Participation in the online surveys for lake users and other interested individuals will be advertised through a variety of media and listservs. Surveys data will be analyzed for use in the next planning meeting for that lake.

The survey design will be structured to provide background information related to the topic(s) in the survey, followed by questions that obtain respondent’s opinions and values for consideration during the plan development. This design is intended to include the landowners that aren’t able to participate in the planning process in person and to enhance knowledge about the relevance of a topic to a larger group of citizens. A social scientist from UW-Stevens Point will provide guidance in survey design to ensure that it meets appropriate survey protocols. We are hopeful that this will increase participation and support for implementation.
A look back through the three Basin Plans that are included in Waushara County make it clear that lake planning, management and protection are of great concern. No significant effort has been made to upgrade lake management plans that reflect the successes or the need for continued efforts. There has been very little effort to develop lake management plans for lakes that have no public access.

Lakes groups in Central Wisconsin are at all levels of activity in their lake management planning. Some groups have yet to become active in developing a plan, while some groups already have a well-organized management plan in action. Most are somewhere in between. Many of the lake management plans that do exist had minimal input from community members and are focused on narrow topics.

Waushara County sees a need for involvement with and guidance to lake management units grappling with plan development and implementation. The need is viewed as a local problem, of course, but also as a region-wide problem and beyond. Waushara County seeks to develop and/or update specific lake management plans for each lake group. In recent years, Waushara County Land Conservation Department and Waushara County UW-Extension professionals have added focus to lake management and supporting the needs of riparian landowners in addition to more traditional support to the agricultural community. In recent years the land conservation department has been more engaged with lake issues and is in partnership with the Waushara County Watershed Lakes Council. The department attends the council’s quarterly meetings as well as providing any logistical support (such as providing meeting rooms, projectors, screens etc.) for the council. Waushara County coordinates efforts with other departments such as parks and highway to install best management practices (BMPs) on riparian properties. Developing individual lake management plans will better serve citizen activities in and around the lake. These plans will assist Waushara County with its long range planning efforts. UW-Extension in Waushara County provides communication amongst lake stewards by housing and managing an email list-serve, assisting with the organization of quarterly meetings of the Waushara County Watershed Lakes Council, and inviting speakers.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Ed Hernandez

Ed Hernandez, County Conservationist
Waushara County Land Conservation & Zoning Office